

Something he asked me to note at the beginning: This is all based on memory, not fact, so don't take it for fact.

The story starts in the summer of 1950. He'd just finished his sophomore year in college at Washington State, majored in agriculture. As was required during the first two years of his college, he had to take a credit for a junior course in reserve officer's training. When he went into his junior year, he had the option of going into the senior reserve officer's training called ROTC ("rotsee") and come out of college a second lieutenant if he passed, so he decided to do that.

That was right when the Korean War started, June of 1950. There was a draft, so if he had to go in the army, he'd rather go in as an officer than, in his words, a doggie.

He signed up for that course and went into the reserve officers' training course in the last two years of college. He did very well, in fact he excelled in it and finished very high in the class. After that, he was regimented, had a regimental commander and two or three battalion commanders. He ended up being a battalion commander himself. In 1952, he got his degree, and at the same time got his second lieutenant commission, and also at that same time, orders to report to the army because things were really popping in Korea at the time.

Two of his buddies and him took off to report to the training center in Fort Benning, Georgia. They took a great trip seeing his brother in medical school in the U of Chicago, saw the Big Apple, saw DC, saw all the touristy stuff before arriving in Fort Benny, probably late June of '52.

He went into officers' training course. A month or two into that course, he got pulled out of his class and was informed his dad had died of a heart attack. He was given an emergency leave to go for the ceremonies and everything. When he came back to the school, which was a couple weeks later, he was sent back into a later class so he could catch up to where he was supposed to be.

He must have gotten out of that school at about late fall or early winter, and was assigned to a unit in Fort Louis, Washington, right out of Tacoma. That was good duty. He had two good roommates at the officer's quarters...that was a ball, that was home territory for him with college chums. He was responsible for training new inductees in some part of the training program, he can't remember what it was called, but it was a big dog and pony show where they put on flashy combat simulations and so forth. That went well.

Then he got his orders to go overseas. He doesn't remember if he was assigned to Japan or directly to Korea.

Incidentally, at the time, since high school, he had been courting my grandmother [redacted]. They were on and off over a four- or five-year period, and at the time, she decided she was doing something different. She got a job with the army as a secretary and was assigned to Japan. He went over to Japan about the same time she went over to take on the new job. They met up, she was in Yokohama, he was in Tokyo, but they were close enough that there was only a train ride to get to one place or the other. He was in Japan for a couple months and he didn't go to Korea until May. They got a lot closer and fairly serious, but still not sure what they were going to do, and of course, he was going into combat in Korea so who knew how that would end up?

Finally, he went to Korea, while [Grandma] was assigned to whatever army (maybe navy) group she was with in Yokohama.

Before you went over, you heard the war stories, or rather the horror stories. They said, "Whatever you do, don't go to the 40th Division, 123rd Regiment, Battalion 2"...and, naturally, that's where he got assigned because they'd been up in the punch bowl, and they took substantial losses and needed some fresh meat to feed to the Chinese (or North Koreans, whichever).

So he was assigned to the 40th Division, either 123rd or 124th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Company C, and had responsibility for a platoon, 2nd Platoon as he remembers. Platoon was about 8 riflemen, maybe an automatic rifleman, then attached to you was someone who was part of the heavy-duty munitions: Mortars, automatic weapons and so forth. He reported to Company C, had a wonderful company commander: The commander was very combat-savvy, field commissioned and was appointed an officer while he was fighting. At the time, he didn't know much about combat and was as green as could be, and they had some real tough combat until just before he got there.

It was at that time both sides were backing off with a buffer zone between them: Not much real combat, and he wasn't in any real combat. You just kind of looked over the ledge of the bunkers. About that time, they decided they were going to move him from the punch bowl to the famous Heartbreak Ridge, and that was a real rugged battle station. They had come to an impasse: The Chinese were in a little lesser hill between half a mile to a mile away, and you just kind of stared each other down because you never knew who was going to start something first.

They assigned him to go reconnaissance the move, which he did. He came back and moved the units, and he got them lost going over, but fortunately not behind enemy lines, instead it was a short "where the hell are we, we took a wrong turn" kind of lost. They took up positions in what he remembers as some trenches and lots of bunkers with covers on the top of the hill. He doesn't remember physically shooting at anyone, they were out there a mile and that was no-man's land for half a mile. That said, there was a lot of exchange of mortar shells and artillery. In particular, it seemed like the Chinese had someone standing behind the meals and the chow line and signaling when they were eating, because they always seemed to shell at chow time. They'd change the time they eat, and the Chinese would turn right around and change when they were shelling, so they had a lot of disrupted meals. Mortars aren't very accurate, and he doesn't remember (might have been, but doesn't remember) the chow line getting hit.

I asked, how close did they come to hitting anyone? He can't remember. They lost one guy, doesn't know the exact circumstances but it was very unfortunate where, they had a flamethrower and a shell hit the bunker he was in, blew the flamethrower up and killed him, but other than that, he doesn't remember anybody getting hit. But they had plenty of shelling, and plenty of gunfire at each other, but you just did some boom-boom and then ducked back down, it wasn't very active. Heartbreak Ridge was famous for being fought over by both sides, lots of hand-to-hand combat, but that was over by then with this faceoff. It was combat, but neither side wanted to fight.

He had a good platoon, most guys had been through heavy stuff and were good soldiers, hell of a lot better than him, he was a greenie. One particular guy had been in Korea since the start of the war, which was two years by then, and he was a really good soldier. He was a platoon sergeant, which is kind of your right-hand man when you're a platoon leader, but he had a weakness: Korean women and Korean booze, and once in a while he'd take off and nobody could find him. He'd be gone for days, and

they kept reassigning him for more time, while you normally stayed in combat for 6 months or whatever, but he'd been there for 2 years and had been in some pretty heavy stuff, but he always knew a really good story and you could depend on him. As Grandpa recalls, at the time he had this guy, the latter had been broken down to private first class but was still given plenty of responsibility because he knew how to do everything.

Grandpa got there in May, moved to Heartbreak Ridge in May or early June. He'd been in artillery fire and mortar fire, but never saw anyone get hit and both sides weren't attacking each other, kind of a standstill. They were in peace talks in Panmunjom and trying to settle the terms of a ceasefire; he's not sure if it was an armistice but it was at least a ceasefire. **[For reference: A ceasefire is an agreement to stop fighting that's meant to be long-lasting and hold after a few violations, but does not officially end a conflict, while an armistice is a mutual agreement to stop military action permanently.]** He had the same platoon that he'd had at the other location from before they moved to Heartbreak Ridge, wherever that first location was.

Into July, the peace talks of ceasefire were pretty hot and heavy, and of course nobody was eager to get out there and get shot, nor did they want to change the lines of where each side was with a buffer in between.

It's amazing what little he remembers of the whole experience. It's sort of vague: They spent most of their time just observing the area and making sure the other side wasn't coming up to get them. Obviously, their command didn't want to challenge them either and that had to do with how active the peace talks were, everyone wanted to get the fighting over with. That leads him to: All of a sudden, they announced that they were going to have a signing of a ceasefire. Again, it might have been an armistice or it might not, but it was a no-more-fighting thing, right at the end of July of 53. By then, he'd been there since May of what he calls combat duty.

Now, we come to a point in the story that Grandpa had already written years ago, called The Last Patrol. He asked me to read that, and we'd go back at it after I did, but it tells of the one real tense experience that he had. Then he'll take me on the rest.

He has a friend who was in the Marines in Korea and saw some real rugged stuff, and he was lucky to come in when things were starting to settle. A good friend of his in Russia's 16-year-old son wants to know about the experiences, which made him realize it's amazing how little he can remember. It was 70 years ago but wow.

[The Last Patrol. At Grandpa's request, I'm not putting it in this story directly as he only wanted very certain people to read it. To summarize, it's late July and everyone expects, and wants, the fighting to stop as is being talked about, but Grandpa and some of the soldiers went out to probe the area for enemy activity to make sure there wasn't a sneak attack. The area had, as mentioned before, already changed hands several times. They approached what they assumed was the edge of enemy territory and couldn't see the enemy but could smell them thanks to the Korean dish of kimchi, which is known for being very strong smelling. They got a radio call from command to open undirected gunfire to the estimated enemy positions to attempt to draw their fire, during which his M2 carbine jammed. There was no return fire, much to Grandpa's relief, and the men returned to their lines. The day after the signing of the ceasefire/armistice, the area they had been in was flooded with previously enemy troops.]

The thing he was shocked about on the last patrol was how many Chinese there were around once the shooting had stopped, suddenly they were all over the place. His unit continued to be on site at Heartbreak Ridge, and the two sides just looked at each other.

Along the way, which would have been September or October, he was promoted to first lieutenant and moved to battalion headquarters to run the motor pool. He didn't know a thing about cars, but they had him running it, and sent him to school about servicing trucks. That was very good duty, because he had access to a jeep at all times and kind of carte blanche to do whatever he wanted as long as the motor pool ran right. Nobody really bugged him in it at all.

Before he went there, that soldier who had the woman and drinking problem took off again and Grandpa had to go get him. Grandpa didn't know how long he'd been gone but he'd been AWOL, and when Grandpa found him, he couldn't convince him to come back. He was stoned and had a woman and wasn't coming back, so finally Grandpa had to give him a direct order, which is a very serious matter, to come back, which he still wouldn't obey. There must have had a couple of MPs (Military Police) with him, who took him into custody. Grandpa had to testify against him, which really made him sad that the guy defied a direct order, and he ended up going to the stockade. Very sad experience. Grandpa still doesn't remember his name.

Next, he's at the battalion, and he kind of ran all over. He remembered doing things for the chaplain. In the fall of 53, the chaplain sent him to Japan a couple of times to pick up things, knowing that [Grandma] was over there and he'd get a chance to see her and spend a little time with her. [Grandma] and [Grandpa] got more serious at this time. They decided to get married, and that would have been in November of 53, and he got a special R&R to go over and they got married within her military group that she was with, and then took her on probably a long weekend honeymoon up to an official army recreation place they had for officers. Then he went back to Korea, she stayed in Japan, that was November or early December of 53.

Sometime during that period, his cousin's husband who was an old college friend was stationed someplace in Korea with an artillery outfit, and Grandpa took off one time with one of his drivers and found him and spent the better part of the day with him, but he was on maneuvers, so he was busy.

For the next several months, not much happened. He took care of the motor pool even though he didn't know anything about cars or trucks and repairing them.

In April, he was ordered to go home, so he'd been in Korea for just about two years. He went back to Japan, [Grandma] was a dependent, and they traveled back on a very comfortable troop carrier that was designed for having other people on it. That was a week's trip back to the States. They sailed into Seattle, he was assigned to Fort Louis, and shortly after that, he mustered out.

In the meantime, he'd made some contacts looking for a job, and was offered a job by a couple of companies. He decided to go with General Mills. They bought their first car, traveled to Montana, and the rest is history.

It was a great honor and privilege to serve in the military for him. They asked him to join the regular army, said they'd promote him to captain as a career position, but he said he didn't want the military. He's never been sorry he made that choice. He enjoyed the military, and he did well, it suited him, but he didn't want a career out of it. But it was a great privilege. He felt he was doing something for his

country, and he thought that if he could make a little difference, what his offspring might face in the form of being part of any military, he'd do it so that he'd be happy to do it.

It's interesting how, some way, he can't grasp details. Anything vivid that would have happened, he's sure he would have remembered it, but there was a lot of just being a soldier and carrying out his responsibilities, but that's it.

Questions

Did he meet any civilians? Any South Korean army? What did they think about Americans?

Civilians were all around. He doesn't remember any names. They had it pretty posh with "boys that took care of us," shine the shoes, take care of the uniforms, no special memories but they did good work for a nominal fee. Doesn't remember any person that he connected with on any relationship basis. As for South Korean military contact, very little. When they went to take over Heartbreak Ridge, they replaced an SK unit stationed there. There was the transfer of know-how and such, that was the only contact he had with the SK army. They were good soldiers. They'd been on Heartbreak Ridge and had been doing heavy duty fighting.

Japan: He was there only 7 or 8 years after WW2. What about them?

They played well with Americans, kept them happy. They had good recreation facilities, and the Japanese stocked them well. They were a complaint ex-enemy. He liked Japan. The officer's clubs and the recreation facilities and the travel and the public, they were good. Very difficult to communicate with, big language barrier so you were lucky when you could find someone you could talk with. Japanese were very humbled and knew their place as far as being a country that had been beat and played the role well. He doesn't remember a lot of problems that anybody had locally with Japanese people, like resentment and so forth.

Did he stay in touch with his platoon after he went home?

No. He was always sad about the good soldier who couldn't keep his nose out of the booze and the women. He had a very good company commander, he was a rawbone sergeant who came up through the ranks, and he didn't stay in touch with him either. Nor with any of his military contacts once he left the military. He said "that's the past" and went on to something else and never went back to any units. He was required to stay in the reserves for at least four years, but never had any call-up or duty or anything he had to do as far as that responsibility was concerned. His reserve status expired. He's kind of always been that way, even his youth and education were sort of broken up: They moved when he was halfway through his junior year in high school, had some very strong ties with the kids he grew up with, but never went back to them and went onto another life and didn't go back to any part of that old life or friendships. He's contacted a few of them but mostly to say "hello, are you alive, I'm alive," and that's about it. In fact, he remembers his best buddy in high school from before he moved to Portland. Grandpa got ahold of him, and he was still kicking around, and he came from quite a wealthy family, Browning Machine Gun was the company. His friend admitted he's never done anything with his life and didn't have to do anything. When Grandpa was in his high school in Portland, he went to three different schools in the year and a half while they were getting settled, made no strong ties, played some football, made a couple friends that lasted for a couple years, but nothing special.